NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
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CHARLES MEDD

AMY CARTER FINDS A SCHOOL

ANNCR:

MR. AND MRS. JIMMY CARTER OF PLAINS, GEORGIA ANNOUNCED THIS PAST WEEKEND THEIR NINE-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER, AMY, WILL ATTEND A PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WHEN THE FAMILY MOVES TO WASHINGTON IN JANUARY. CHARLES MEDD HAS THIS REACTION.

VOICE:

THE AVERAGE AMERICAN WHOSE JOB TAKES HIM FROM ONE CITY TO ANOTHER HAS TWO IMMEDIATE CONCERNS -- FINDING A HOME FOR HIS FAMILY AND A SCHOOL FOR HIS CHILDREN. FOR JIMMY CARTER -- WHO'S HARDLY THE AVERAGE AMERICAN -- THE HOME IS NO PROBLEM: THE WHITE HOUSE GOES WITH THE JOB. NOR IN THIS CASE WAS FINDING A SCHOOL. NINE-YEAR-OLD AMY WILL ENROLL AT THE THADDEUS STEVENS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, JUST A FEW BLOCKS FROM HER HOME-TO-BE AT SIXTEEN HUNDRED PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE.

WHAT MAKES THIS A NEWS STORY IS THE FACT THAT FEW PRESIDENTS HAVE HAD SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN TO WORRY ABOUT AND THE FEW THAT HAVE HAVE SENT THEIRS TO THE MORE EXCLUSIVE PRIVATE SCHOOLS. THE LAST PRESIDENT TO SEND A CHILD TO A PUBLIC SCHOOL IN WASHINGTON WAS THEODORE ROOSEVELT. THAT WAS SEVENTY YEARS AGO, AND MUCH HAS HAPPENED TO THE CITY'S SCHOOL SYSTEM SINCE THEN.

UNTIL THE MID-NINETEEN FIFTIES, PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN WASHINGTON, AS IN THE ENTIRE SOUTHERN HALF OF THE UNITED STATES, WERE BY LAW RACIALLY SEGREGATED. WHEN THE SUPREME COURT FOUND SEGREGATION UNCONSTITUTIONAL, PUBLIC EDUCATION IN MANY LARGE CITIES UNDERWENT RADICAL CHANGE, NONE MORE PROFOUND THAN HERE IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL, ONE OF THE FEW MAJOR CITIES WHERE BLACKS ARE IN THE MAJORITY.

TODAY, SOME TWENTY YEARS AFTER THE COURT'S HISTORIC RULING, BLACK STUDENTS MAKE UP MORE THAN NINETY-FIVE PER CENT OF WASHINGTON'S PUBLIC SCHOOL POPULATION. VARIOUS FACTORS LED TO THE PRESENT RACIAL IMBALANCE -- A DISTASTE FOR CLASSROOM INTEGRATION ON THE PART OF SOME WHITE PARENTS AND THE WIDE-SPREAD BELIEF AMONG MANY PARENTS, BOTH WHITE AND BLACK, THAT THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION HAS DETERIORATED. AS A RESULT, WHITES IN LARGE NUMBERS, AND EVEN BLACKS TO SOME EXTENT, HAVE EITHER LEFT THE CITY FOR THE SURROUNDING SUBURBS OR HAVE CHOSEN TO SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS.

DURING HIS PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN, JIMMY CARTER REPEATEDLY ATTACKED THOSE HE CALLED THE "POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ELITE" WHOSE POLICIES, HE SAID, WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DECLINE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION AND WHO ESCAPED RESPONSIBILITY BY SENDING THEIR CHILDREN TO PRIVATE ACADEMIES. FOR MISTER CARTER, THE DECISION TO ENROLL HIS DAUGHTER IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL FULFILLS A CAMPAIGN PLEDGE. FOR YOUNG AMY, THE DECISION WOULD SEEM AS LOGICAL AS IT IS PLEASING. HER NEW SCHOOL, LIKE THE ONE IN PLAINS, IS JUST A SHORT WALK FROM HOME. AND, ALSO, AS IN PLAINS, HER CLASSMATES WILL BE MOSTLY BLACK. MOREOVER, AMY -- HER MOTHER SAYS -- ENJOYS SCIENCE, AND THE FOURTH GRADE AT THE THADDEUS STEVENS SCHOOL IS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN STUDYING PLANTS AND OTHER LIVING THINGS SHORTLY AFTER SHE JOINS THE CLASS IN LATE JANUARY.

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